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ABSTRACT

An experiment in the development of English language educational television programs for secondary schools in Hong Kong is reported. The programs feature samples of spontaneous English spoken by local Hong Kong personalities, all of whom speak English as a second language. Samples discussed here are taped interviews with a music recording executive and a fashion designer. The programs were shown to 50 secondary school teachers, who were asked which features they found appealing, how they perceived the quantity and level of new vocabulary introduced, whether the Hong Kong English used was acceptable, and whether they perceived instances of incorrect English. The study also analyzed one excerpt for lexical density, lexical variation, and new word density and compared with the same measures for a text intended for the same target group. Results of these analyses are reported. It is concluded that such materials can be useful, but must meet basic criteria: (1) use of real people whose lives and jobs are of genuine interest to the target audience, (2) use of fluent, though not necessarily error-free, English; (3) inclusion of a small portion of new vocabulary central to the topic; and (4) explanation of new language through visual context. Contains nine references. Excerpts from interviews are appended. (MSE)

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WHAT MAKES AUTHENTIC MATERIALS DIFFERENT? THE CASE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE MATERIALS FOR EDUCATIONAL TELEVISION

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WHAT MAKES AUTHENTIC MATERIALS DIFFERENT? THE CASE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE MATERIALS FOR EDUCATIONAL TELEVISION

Arthur McNeill

1. Introduction

This paper describes an experiment in the development of English language educational television (ETV) programmes in Hong Kong. The experiment involved using samples of spontaneous English spoken by local Hong Kong personalities, all of whom spoke English as a second language. Traditionally, ETV programmes are carefully scripted and the language used is often intended to provide illustrations of particular language structures or functions. The artists who feature in the programmes are almost invariably native speakers of English, but are usually not professionally trained actors. This combination of didactic script and amateur artists has often resulted in programmes in which the use of English appears unnatural and the thematic content lacks real-world relevance. In an attempt to provide the target audience, Hong Kong secondary school pupils, with materials which might stimulate their interest in English and provide examples of English being used naturally by second language users in Hong Kong, it was decided to design a series of programmes based on (a) spontaneous (unscripted) spoken English and, (b) non-native speakers who use English to communicate as part of their everyday jobs in Hong Kong. This paper describes the materials, reports on teachers' reactions to them and compares the textual qualities of the materials with synthetic texts created for the same audience.

2. Authenticity and Language Teaching

The advantages and disadvantages of using authentic materials to teach a second language have been widely discussed. A number of researchers argue strongly for the motivating power of authentic materials, in particular their contribution to overcoming some of the cultural barriers to language learning (Kienbaum, Russell and Welty 1986, Nostrand 1989, Westphal 1986). Others (e.g. Beeching 1982) acknowledge that many authentic materials are simply too difficult for many language learners to deal with and can have a discouraging rather than a motivating effect on students. It is often difficult for teachers to find an appropriate pedagogical function for authentic materials, with the result that students do not always see the value in using them.

At this stage, it is probably useful to try to categorise the materials referred to in the study in terms of their claim to being considered authentic. It has proved difficult for applied linguists to agree about what exactly constitutes authenticity. A widely held view is that authentic materials are texts produced by native speakers for a non-pedagogical purpose (e.g. Bacon and Finnemann 1990). According to such a definition of authenticity, the materials used in the present study are not authentic since they are produced by non-native speakers of English. To restrict the

definition of authenticity to texts produced by native speakers is obviously not acceptable in a second language context such as Hong Kong, where English texts are produced daily by Chinese native speaker civil servants, educationalists and businessmen as part of their official duties. In this connection, the definition put forward by Little et al. (1988:21) is more appropriate. They describe authentic language as "created to fulfil some social purpose in the language community in which it was produced."

While this definition is acceptable inasmuch as it accounts for the language of the texts used in the study, it does not say anything about the purpose for which the text is used or the way in which the texts are perceived by the target audience of secondary school pupils. Lynch (1982:11) warns of the complex semantics of "authenticity" and enumerates the synonyms for "authentic" used by a number applied linguists, to illustrate the different perceptions of the term which exist in the field. Widdowson (1979), in particular, provides a contrasting view to those mentioned above and argues that authenticity is not a quality of a text, but relates to the way in which a reader/listener responds to and interacts with a text. So far, the materials used in the present study have only been considered in terms of their authenticity as texts. The response to the texts as texts, rather than to tasks related to the texts, has been investigated by gathering teachers' opinions of the materials. Ultimately, the response of pupils to text-related tasks will have to looked into before any final assessment of the materials can be made. As Bacon and Finnemann (1990) point out, very little empirical research has been carried out to establish learners' cognitive and affective responses to authentic input. Their own research based on first-year Spanish students at two mid-western universities suggests that exposure to authentic input has a positive perceived effect on comprehension and learner satisfaction. However, the researchers point out that learners first need to be convinced of the value of dealing with authentic materials and recommend that exposure to them should start in the early stages of language learning and should be an important part of language instruction.

3. The Hong Kong "Authentic" ETV Materials

The programmes are intended for pupils in Form 2 of secondary school, most of whom are in the thirteen to fourteen age group. They form part of the Hong Kong Education Department's Educational Television Service's Bauhinia Series. (Senior producer: Yvonne Cheung, Director: Tina Wong, Language adviser: Arthur McNeill). The format of the materials is based on a structured interview, in which an interviewer guides an interviewee through a sequence of pre-prepared questions. The questions are intended to elicit expansive responses from the interviewee about aspects of his or her work. As far as possible they are designed in such a way that particular rhetorical patterns are prompted, such as descriptions, sequences of events, causes and effects, etc. Since the participants are not native speakers of English, the accuracy of their output cannot be guaranteed. However, in order to ensure fluency in the interviews, the interviewees were given the questions in advance and had the opportunity to chat informally to the interviewer before the recordings were made. The approach follows that used by the producers of the

long-running BBC radio programme "Desert Island Discs." The general sketching in advance of the topics to be covered helps the interviewees to gather their ideas in preparation for the actual interview.

Since the programmes are intended to stimulate pupils' interest in learning English for use in Hong Kong, the choice of language informants was an important one. It was hoped that the pupils would be genuinely interested in what the interviewees had to say, both in terms of their "story" as successful Hong Kongers and in terms of the activities and processes which they describe. In the samples referred to in this paper the two interviewees are William Tang (Tang Chi Tak), a fashion designer, and Mr Mahmoud (Lam Mo Tak), who runs a music recording business. Not only are the individuals well known in Hong Kong, but their fields of activity are visually appealing and provide in the video plenty of visual clues to what is being discussed. The interviewer, Helen Yung (Yung Hau Lung), was the first runner-up in the Miss Hong Kong contest in 1991. She is well known to the audience, speaks excellent English and is able to interact easily with the interviewees. Transcripts of four interview samples are reproduced in Appendix A.

4. Research Question

The general question which guided this first part of the study is as follows:

> How can the attractive features of authentic video be captured within a usable pedagogical framework in Hong Kong?

5. Teachers' Reactions

The four video extracts (Appendix A) were shown to 50 secondary school teachers of English, who completed a questionnaire which grouped their responses into four broad categories:

1. Features which might make the materials appealing to Hong Kong secondary school pupils.
2. Reactions to the high concentration of content words
3. The acceptability of Hong Kong English in teaching materials
4. Awareness of instances of incorrect English

The results of the questionnaire responses are summarised in Tables 1-4.

6. The Appealing Features

The teachers were first asked to note down any features which they considered might make the materials appealing to Hong Kong pupils. The most frequently mentioned features are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1

Features which make the programme appealing to HK secondary school pupils

	Feature	No. (n=50)	%
1.	Well known, interesting local personalities (success stories which might inspire pupils)	41	82
2.	Natural, spontaneous use of language	39	78
3.	A well known personality as interviewer	37	74
4.	Choice of topics	35	70
5.	Interviewer's clarification of new language/concepts	26	52
6.	Format easy to follow, yet not obviously an ETV programme	24	48

It is clear from the responses that the choice of local personalities was considered to have a very strong impact on the pupils' interest in the programmes. The fact that the two personalities were local success stories, engaged in international industries which prosper in Hong Kong, appeared to exert a special appeal. The majority of the teachers also considered that the natural use of language would make the materials popular with pupils. About half of the respondents stated that they found the interviewer's clarifications helpful in making the material accessible and comprehensible to the pupils. It might be argued that "authenticity" for these respondents is concerned with local relevance and reality, as well as naturally occurring English.

7. New Vocabulary

The second issue on which teachers' opinions were sought was the relatively high incidence of content words in the text, in particular the occurrence of some new, mostly technical vocabulary items. These occurred when the interviewees were describing aspects of their jobs. During the editing of the interviews, it was decided to include a number of new technical terms, since these arose naturally out of the situations described and could be regarded as essential. Examples of such words are

"pattern cutter", "marketing people", "tape hiss", "high end" (of sound) and "modem". The teachers were asked to focus on the unfamiliar vocabulary in the text and to say whether the new words made the programmes too difficult or whether the new words were necessary to make the materials interesting. The responses are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Teachers' reactions to the high concentration of content words

	Feature	Agree No.	%	Disagree No.	%
1.	The additional vocabulary makes programme too difficult for pupils to follow.	13	26	37	74
2.	Without these words, programme would lose authenticity and would be less interesting.	43	86	7	14

The majority agreed that the new words were necessary and contributed to the authentic flavour of the texts. It was considered that there would be a loss of interest if the new words were omitted. It was also pointed out that the meanings of the new words were made clear either by the context or the visuals or both.

8. Acceptability of Hong Kong English in Teaching Materials

One of the most frequently cited reasons for using recorded materials in language teaching is to provide learners with models of correct language use. Obviously, spontaneous texts spoken by non-native speakers are less suited as models. The teachers were asked to give their reactions to the use of non-native speakers in the videos and to give their reasons for supporting the use of non-native speakers, as well as giving reasons for any reservations. The responses are shown in Table 3.

82% of the respondents considered that the language spoken on the videos was "natural and spontaneous." This implies that, as far as they were concerned, it was authentic. Many pointed out that the samples of Hong Kong English were actually easier for their pupils to understand than English spoken by native speakers. It was felt that pupils' confidence in their own English would be boosted by the examples shown. It was pointed out by over half the teachers that the materials were best suited to listening practice activities, in which listening fluency rather than accuracy is the main focus. It was acknowledged that there was the possible danger that some teachers might use the materials as models, since this practice is so

which accompany ETV programmes should discourage teachers from using these materials as models. However, the overwhelming response by the teachers was that the samples of Hong Kong were totally acceptable for inclusion in teaching videos.

Table 3

Use of Hong Kong English in teaching materials

	Feature	No. (n=50)	%
A.	Reasons for support		
1.	Natural and spontaneous	41	82
	Easier for students to understand than native speakers		
2.	Pace is relatively slow	33	66
3.	Inspires learners with confidence in their	29	58
4.	own English	23	46
5.	Helps to make students aware of typical Hong Kong errors	11	22
	B: Reasons for reservations:		
1.	Should be restricted to fluency work (listening practice)	27	54
2.	Need to avoid exposing learners to too many instances of inaccurate English	21	42
3.	Need to discourage teachers from using the texts as models	19	38
4.	Need to maintain a variety of programme types (e.g., dramatised stories, songs, etc. which involve more action)	12	24

9. Awareness of Errors

In the editing of the materials, an effort was made to omit any glaring errors in English. However, in the final version there are a few instances of incorrect grammar and pronunciation which could not have been removed without serious loss of content. In order to establish whether teachers were aware of these errors, they were asked to watch one of the excerpts (Excerpt 2) once without being asked

to focus on the accuracy of the language. At the end of the first viewing they were asked to note down any instances of incorrect English they had noticed. They then watched the excerpt a second time and were asked to listen for errors. The responses are given in Table 4.

Table 4

Teachers' awareness of instances of incorrect English

		Not aware		Noticed 1 error		Noticed over 1 error	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1.	First viewing	35	70	8	16	7	14
2.	Second viewing	0	0	0	0	50	100

On the first viewing only 14% of the teachers were aware of more than one error, whereas all of the teachers were able to identify more than one error on second viewing. This suggests that the presence of occasional minor errors in a spoken text does not really interfere with comprehension. It might be argued further that if few teachers are aware of formal errors when they listen to a text for the first time, the chances of their pupils being aware of the errors is far less.

10. Textual Features

In order to gain a more objective picture of the characteristics of the materials, three measures were applied to Excerpt 4: lexical density, lexical variation and new word density. For sake of comparison, the same measures were applied to a published listening text intended for the same target group (Form 2) and widely used in Hong Kong schools. The listening text is not "authentic" by any stretch of the definition and was written for a pedagogical purpose: to provide listening comprehension practice. The listening text is reproduced in Appendix B. The results are contained in Table 5.

The lexical density is calculated by dividing the number of lexical (content) words by the total number of words and multiplying by 100. This gives us an indication of the relative distribution of lexical and grammar words in the text. In written texts there are generally more lexical words relative to grammar words than is the case in spoken texts. In Ure's (1971) analysis of 34 spoken and 30 written texts, it was concluded that the lexical density of spoken texts is generally under 40%, while that of written texts tends to be over 40% (37% - 57%). In the case of our "authentic" video sample text, the lexical density is 28%, while the synthetic commercially produced listening text for the same target group has a lexical density of 45%, which suggests that, in terms of the distribution of lexical and grammar words, it has more in common with a written than a spoken text.

Table 5

Some lexical comparisons of authentic video sample with published listening comprehension text for the same audience

	Sample authentic video text	Published listening text*
Lexical density	28%	45%
Lexical variation (types/tokens)	21:64 (1:3)	83:160 (1:2)

*Chamberlain, J. *Communicating in English 2*, Hong Kong: Witman, 1987

The second measure, lexical variation, gives an indication of the type-token ratio in the text. This is calculated by dividing the number of separate words (types) by the total number of words (tokens). Lexical variation counts give us a rough measure of how many new items are introduced into a text as it unfolds (i.e. new to the text, not necessarily new to the learners). In the case of the video extract, the type-token ratio is approximately one to three, compared to one to two for the synthetic listening text, which suggests that the video text will be easier for a viewer to follow than the listening text is for a listener, provided not too many of the vocabulary items are unknown.

This brings us to the third measure, new word density, which is the % of words in a text which are new to the reader/listener. The teachers who took part in the survey were asked to estimate how many of the words in Extract 4 and the published listening text were new to Form 2 pupils. It is hard to get an accurate measure of new word density, since we cannot be completely sure that a word is new to pupils. The calculation is made more difficult by the presence of polysemous words (e.g. "high end" (of sound) "to mix (tracks)", "strings" and "brass" (in an orchestra). While pupils may know the words in their more general meaning, they may or may not be able to work out the sense in which they are used in the text. The results produced by the teachers indicate that the new words in the video extract account for less than 2% of the whole text, which represents a rate of occurrence of roughly one new word in every fifty known words. By contrast, the listening text had a new word density of 0%.

11. Conclusion

The presence of unfamiliar vocabulary does not, by itself, render a text difficult for a learner. Other textual features, such as lexical density and variation, need to be taken into account as well. As the teachers' survey shows, new vocabulary in a text

can be a symptom of interesting content, which is necessary to sustain learners' interest. By contrast, the synthetic text mentioned above had no new language, which may account for its content-free flavour. Yet, according to the lexical density and variation measures, it was more difficult for the target group to process.

According to the results of the present study, it is possible to produce and use as teaching materials video programmes featuring Hong Kong personalities who speak English as a second language, provided they meet some basic criteria: (a) They need to involve real people whose lives and/or jobs are of genuine interest to the learners, (b) The individuals selected should be able to speak fluent, though not necessarily error-free English, (c) The texts should include a small proportion of new vocabulary, central to the topic, and (d) The visual context should provide an explanation of new language. However, before a more substantial framework can be put forward for the development of authentic video materials in Hong Kong, some empirical work needs to be carried out involving the most important personality in the whole equation: the learner.

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Appendix 1. Transcript of four interview samples

Excerpt 1 (Interviewer: Helen Yung, Interviewee: William Tang)

HY: Now, William, I know that you did not study fashion designing and so how did you start your career as a fashion designer?

WT: Well, I'd gone through my secondary school studying mathematics and sciences like most boys, and then at the university I studied economics and business.

HY: Economics and business?

WT: Yea, so towards the end of my fourth year, I told myself, you know, what really I want to do in the future. Should I do what my parents told me or should I do something that I believe myself. So I believe I should change my future into something that I believe. And I love drawing and sketching since my childhood. So I decided to leave Canada after I got my degree and I went to England for fashion design. That's how I started.

Excerpt 2 (Interviewer: Helen Yung, Interviewee: William Tang)

HY: What are the different stages involved in making clothes? Could you tell us what happens from start to finish?

WT: Very difficult. Well first of all, as a designer, you have to get your ideas together and put them onto a piece of paper - the sketching. OK, this is the first part.

HY: Sketching?

WT: And most people mistaken the first part. That's it. That's fashion design. It's not. It's only the step one, OK? From step one we move on to choosing materials. It's very very important whether the design is right for this material. You have to judge that, OK? So choosing material. Then after choosing material, you have to go on to pattern cutting.

HY: Pattern cutting?

WT: Yea, pattern cutting. So, you cut the paper and then you cut the material and then you sew it. So, this is the next step, to sew it. OK, after you sew it, the garment is right. Then you have to make sure everything is right - no mistake whatsoever. Then you have to carry on to manufacturing. But before manufacturing, you have to consult your marketing people or the salesmen whether you should produce or not.

HY: Consult marketing people and salesmen whether you should produce?

WT: Right and afterwards, you have to work together with your manufacturer. They have to give you time and space to produce all the garments. And after you produce them, you put them into the market to sell them.

HY: Into the market to sell?
WT: Yea, it's about that. And besides that, you have to do promotions.
HY: Promotions?
WT: Yea, advertisement.
HY: Advertisement?
WT: And all the money arrangements as well.
HY: Money arrangements? OK.
WT: Of course. It's really costly actually. So it's a really long procedure.
HY: It's a very long procedure.

Excerpt 3 (Interviewer: Helen Yung, Interviewee: Mr Mahmoud)

HY: Have you heard these songs before? Do you like them? Well, the composition and production of songs is a career that Mr Mahmoud has chosen since his secondary school days. Obviously, it's a very fascinating job for him, but let's hear more about this job from Mr Mahmoud himself. Hello there, Mahmoud. How are you?
MM: Fine.
HY: What are you doing?
MM: Well, I'm mixing a baby diaper commercial.
HY: Very interesting. In fact, all this equipment here is very interesting. What are they?
MM: Well, to start off with, in front of me is a mixing console. And what it does is it controls all the tracks that I have recorded and I can mix it together on it. This is a DAT. And what it stands for is "Digital Audio Tape". And this is what the tape looks like. See how small it is?
HY: Yea, it is quite small. What are some of the advantages of using DAT?
MM: Well, for one, it doesn't record music. All it records is 1s, 0s, 0s and 1s. So it's very clear. And it has no tape hiss.
HY: What is "tape hiss"?
MM: It means there's no tape noise, like the "ss" you hear on cassettes. And these are synthesizers and they're known as samplers because they sample sound, which means they record sounds digitally and they play back like a piano.
HY: Oh! Will you show me how?
MM: OK. Well,the top one I've got a trumpet sound going and it goes something like this.
HY: I recognise that. What about these two other ones?
MM: OK, well, this one is, eh, well, you listen first, OK? You tell me what it is.
HY: A car accident in the middle of rush hour!
MM: This is our recording room. And see how many instruments in here?
HY: There are a lot.
MM: It's pretty messy. And notice there's a mirror. Do you know why there's a mirror?
HY: No, why is there a mirror?
MM: Because the mirror reflects a lot of the high end of the sound and makes everything brighter.

HY: Can you give me an example?

MM: Yea, like "ss-ss-ss-ss-ss", so you can hear the "ss" a lot better. And this is the computer. I do most of my arrangements now on the computer. And what it does is when I play a note, it records exactly what I play and it shows on the computer. I'll show you. Let me take a seat. OK, now, this is what I just played. See? There's a line that goes through here.

HY: Yea, I see that.

MM: And that's exactly what I just played, so I can actually add something on it. See?

HY: Mm, very interesting.

MM: Very interesting. Yea.

Excerpt 4 (Interviewer: Helen Yung, Interviewee: Mr Mahmoud)

HY: So what do you usually do after composing the melody?

MM: That's a good one. What I did was I arranged the music after that, would go into a studio and record the music, supervise the vocals, which is the singer, and mix the music and the vocals after that. But nowadays, I use a team to do it. What I do is I record the music or the melody, so to speak, on the computer and I use a modem to send the material to an arranger. He lives far away. After sending it to him, I would wait about a day before calling him and listen to what he has done. Then I would amend whatever is necessary, over the 'phone, and he will send the data from his house to the studio and, after he does that, we will put it on tape, on the 24 track, and I will ask him to come in to supervise some live recordings, like guitars, or strings - violins, that is - or brass and, usually I'm not there, but after that we will ask the singer to come in and that's when I have to be there because the singer's rendition is going to be the most important thing on the tape because we are selling the singer. So, after that we do the mixing and the mixing session is actually as important as when the singer is in because that time we will have to put the music and the singer's rendition, the vocals, together and that determines our quality on the sound, so that's our procedure.

Appendix 2. Transcript of a commercially produced listening text.

V2: The job interview

Last summer, John applied for a temporary holiday job and was asked to attend an interview. The day of the interview came and John began to get ready in plenty of time. He put on his best jacket and trousers and tied his tie carefully in front of the mirror. Finally, he combed his hair. An hour before the interview he left the house and walked to the bus stop. The morning had been very hot and sunny but it was now very cloudy. John didn't have an

umbrella. It began to rain heavily. He stood under a bridge for a while but the rain didn't stop. Then he saw the bus coming. He ran as quickly as he could to the bus stop. The bus stopped and he got on. He was completely soaked. The traffic was bad and the bus didn't move very quickly. He was half an hour late when he finally arrived at the office for his interview.

V1: Now listen again and check your answers.

V2: The job interview

Source: Chamberlain, J. (1987) *Communicating in English 2*, Hong Kong: Witman.